



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ontario Soil Network kicks off with dedicated team of soil leaders

Guelph, ON, April 3, 2017 – Soil is the foundation of agriculture and at the heart of solutions for water quality, carbon sequestration and sustainability. So it is important that we don't treat soil like dirt.

On March 23-24, fifty soil-loving individuals came together to learn how to be better leaders and communicators about the importance of soil in Ontario agriculture. The Ontario Soil Network's leadership course is coordinated by the Rural Ontario Institute, with support from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA).

The farmers chosen for the program are working to increase cover crops and decrease tillage, using organic amendments and reducing chemical inputs. Most of them are already on the speaking circuit at farm events and are actively involved in organizations like the Innovative Farmers Association of Ontario (IFAO), the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) or the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO). Ten research and extension staff from Conservation Authorities, OMAFRA and industry along with policy staff also joined the course in an effort to break down silos and create better networks across the province.

The two-day workshop included speaker presentations, break-out discussion groups and conversation buzzing over meals. It featured local speakers like Kelly Ann McKnight and Bernard Tobin, who spoke about leadership and giving great presentations. It also featured Odette Menard, who joined the group to talk about innovations in soil health in Quebec, and Ryan Stockwell, a mover and shaker for cover crops, communication and soil-friendly policy in the United States. Don Lobb and Anne Verhallen provided participants with the historical context of soil-related research and programs in Ontario. Lee Briese, a crop consultant from

North Dakota and International Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) of the Year, spoke to the group about the work he does with farmers related to soil health. Sarah Hargreaves (EFAO) and Ian McDonald (OMAFRA) led a session on designing in-field trials to create better confidence in research data. The group wrapped up the workshop by creating a game plan to keep learning and leading for the next ten months of the course.

Stay tuned for more information on the farmers of the Ontario Soil Network.

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PHOTO: Leaders in the Ontario Soil Network, March 24, 2017